

[Faith Undone: The emerging church... a new reformation or an end-time deception?](#)

By Roger Oakland (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2007), 261 pp., \$12.95

Roger Oakland is an author-lecturer and the founder of Understand the Times International ([www.UnderstandTheTimes.org](http://www.UnderstandTheTimes.org)), “an international missionary outreach dedicated to evangelizing the lost and equipping the Church for discernment.” It is this secondary focus, “equipping the Church for discernment,” which is the focus of Oakland's recent work.

My own introduction to the Emerging Church movement came about one afternoon while on a trip to Victoria, Canada. Perusing the religious section of a well-known secular bookstore proved typical: the religion section lacked solid works on Christianity—barely even containing one or two copies of the Bible itself. The lion's share of the limited shelf space allowed for the topic of Christianity contained a variety of books promoting sensational ideas about lost gospels and how the Church has distorted the “true message of Jesus.” Among dubious titles, a small book caught my eye titled, “Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith” by a man named Rob Bell. As I stood in the aisle reading representative samples from the book, it became apparent that here was a new flavor of attack on the historic Christian faith, coming from someone who claimed to be a follower of Christ, but who obviously rejected numerous fundamentals of the faith.

Little did I know that what I was reading was a small sample of the doctrinal confusion and disturbing teachings which characterize pronouncements from leaders of the Emerging Church movement (hereafter, “the movement”)—confusion and doctrines which they attempt to pass off as a “New Reformation.” Unlike the Reformation of Luther and Calvin which was fueled by a rediscovery of the truths of Scripture, this reformation has no such basis and is, in fact, opposed to essential truths found in the Bible. (We will come to see that whereas a proper understanding of Scripture was essential to the Protestant Reformation, the obscuration and denial of Scripture is essential for the Emergent Reformation because it is a departure not a rediscovery.)

After my initial exposure to “Velvet Elvis” I read considerably more about the movement, including pronouncements by some of its key figures. So Roger Oakland's new book, “Faith Undone,” was not so much an introduction to this disturbing movement for me as it was helpful in clarifying common elements between the movement and New Age teaching, as well as helping to expose where many of the ideas characterizing the movement find their basis (hint: *not* from the Bible).

Oakland provides a readable yet sufficiently thorough treatment of the movement enabling believers to become aware of the disturbing teachings endorsed by its key spokesmen. Although the movement may appear to represent a legitimate desire to restore historic (although not New Testament) traditions, live out a more authentic Christian witness, or develop a full-sensory worship experience, bundled with these desires are significant and sometimes subtle distortions of essential truths of Scripture.

Oakland explores these disturbing undercurrents, comparing them with the fundamental truths of Scripture. The movement is seen for what it really is: yet another historical attempt to “hijack” Jesus out of the context of both Old and New Testaments in order to

“reinterpret” or “reimage” (I prefer Peter's terminology: *twist* – 2Pe. 3:16) His teachings.

Key aspects of the true gospel such as: the universality and darkness of human sin, the inability of man to approach God apart from Christ, the message of repentance and justification by blood sacrifice, and the full divinity of Jesus all come under fire by key voices in the movement while our Lord and Savior is summarily diminished and “reinterpreted” as a motivational champion of social change. Predictably, the movement also downplays or, in some cases, denies the need to be “born again,” the exclusivity of the cross, and the Scriptural teaching concerning how God will bring about His kingdom: by negative intervention into the fully-flowered apostasy of man's attempt at self-redemption (Luke 18:8).

Among the more valuable aspects of the book are its discussion of the early contributors and underwriters of the movement, both secular and Christian, and its emphasis on contemplative prayer: especially its ties with mystical practices which open practitioners to the realm of the demonic and lead in the direction of an attempted synthesis of that which is holy with that which is pagan.

Of particular interest (or should I say *concern*) for those who have a systematic grasp of eschatology as taught by the Bible, is the movement's characteristic denial of two Biblical realities: the continued relevance of Israel as God's chosen nation and the denial of a future apostasy and the judgmental intervention of God into human history which finally establishes His kingdom. Thus, Emerging Church movement leaders are disparaging of those who employ a literal-historical hermeneutic (rule of interpretation) and tend toward embracing an interpretive approach to prophetic passages which deny a future period of apostasy and tribulation (e.g., preterist or idealist). Here, I am in agreement with one of Oakland's premises: the movement is unwittingly helping to set the stage for a growing “Christendom” which is completely out-of-step with God's revelation about what is to come.

More serious than issues of eschatology are unorthodox statements made by leaders in the movement regarding core aspects of the gospel such as the nature of the atonement, the exclusivity and means of redemption, and what it means to be “saved.” Oakland also illustrates the profound negative effect such confusion has in relation to mission work and the growing tendency in evangelism to allow or even encourage integration of belief in Jesus with previously-held pagan beliefs (e.g. *syncretism*) which compromises the true gospel in a misguided attempt to please God by mixing the holy with the profane—something which Israel was frequently condemned for in the Old Testament.

Perhaps the single most disturbing aspect which the author discusses is the growing sentiment among the movement to disparage those who hold dear the literal understanding and teaching of the Bible. Make no mistake: although the movement purports to love “Jesus,” spokesmen in the movement spout some stinging diatribes against “Christianity.” This could be expected if what was really being disparaged was “Christendom” -- that apostate Christ-professor's throughout history which have typically misrepresented Christ. But the movement has you and I, basic Bible believers, in the cross-hairs of their criticism—born-again Christians! You see, it is basic Bible believers

who cling to every word of Scripture in their plain sense that are the stumbling block to the agendas of key leaders in the movement. (Yet I have little doubt that history will reveal that it will be the movement which will be seen as playing the role of apostate Christendom.)

A predictable result of the movement's focus to "redefine" Christianity and work within a broad ecumenical partnership for social change to fix the world is its elevation on "following Christ" over the Biblical requirement of being "born-again" in order to be accepted by God (John 3:18, 35-36) and empowered for transformation. Some in the movement confuse true salvation, by belief in Jesus and being born-again and indwelt with the Holy Spirit, with becoming a "Christ-follower" who see Jesus primarily as an example of social leadership destined to bring in the kingdom of God on earth by human means. Thus, like previous liberal movements influencing Christianity, the Emerging Church movement is anxious to shake hands with non-Christians in social works while disparaging those who uphold Biblical teachings.

Anyone who is a born-again believer in Jesus Christ and who clings to the Word of God in all its authority and clarity would do well to understand disturbing aspects of the Emerging Church Movement. A small dose of exposure could be very helpful as an inoculation before the movement begins influencing your own fellowship or other believers you know.

I can recommend Oakland's book as a helpful introduction to the Emergent Church movement's questionable origins, flawed practices, and unorthodox tendencies.

Reviewed by [Tony Garland](http://www.SpiritAndTruth.org) of [www.SpiritAndTruth.org](http://www.SpiritAndTruth.org).